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homemakers' chat
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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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TUESDAY, DECEMBER 28, 1943.

QUESTION BOX
How store eggs?
Uses for old Christmas tree?
Moth damage in unheated closets?

ANSWERS FROM scientists of U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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The mail today has brought quite an assortment of questions from homemakers. One letter asks the best way to store eggs...another asks for a good use to make of a discarded Christmas tree...and a third writer wants to know if moths are likely to damage clothes if the closets aren't heated.

The first letter says, "I usually keep eggs in the refrigerator. Recently I heard that it isn't necessary to keep eggs cold--that they keep just as well in a cupboard. I'd like to know if this is true."

A short time ago the Utah Agricultural Experiment Station tested four household methods of storing eggs. The results of this test indicate that eggs keep best in cool storage which also preserves their natural moisture. Ten homemakers cooperated with the Utah experiment station by storing selected and graded eggs in their homes.

The homemakers stored the eggs in four different locations in their kitchens. They kept one dozen in a cupboard, and put three dozen in the refrigerator: one dozen in an open container...one in the pasteboard carton...and one dozen in the hydrator compartment.

At the end of a week, the scientists of the experiment station examined all the stored eggs. Here's what they found: The eggs in the cupboards had deteriorated greatly...in fact, almost ninety-seven percent of the grade A eggs had gone down in grade C, and the remainder weren't fit to eat.

The refrigerated eggs did much better. Although all the A grade eggs had gone down in grade, only thirty percent of them had gone down to C grade...and

seventy percent were B grade.

The test indicates that even in the refrigerator the various ways of storing eggs made a great difference in how well they keep. Almost half of the A grade eggs in the cartons and the open containers went down to grade C in the refrigerator, and the remainder became grade B. But only five percent of the grade A's in the hydrator went down to C grade...and ninety-five percent of them were grade B at the end of the week's testing period.

The Utah experiment station scientists point out that the meat of eggs contains a large proportion of water, and the shells are porous...so to preserve quality, it's best to keep eggs in a storage place that's cool...fairly moist...and free from objectionable odors, and movement of air.

The results of the Utah test suggest that eggs deteriorate rapidly when you store them improperly at home...so the homemaker may sometimes be just as responsible for loss of quality in eggs as the farmer or the distributor--who usually gets the blame if a "bad egg" turns up.

Eggs deserve the best of care in your kitchen these days, because they're an important food in wartime diets. Nutritionists call them a "protective food" because they give the body minerals and vitamins that safeguard health. The yolk of an egg is one of the best sources of iron. And eggs contain protein of high quality, which makes them a good body-building and body-repairing food for children and adults.

Remember that an egg has a natural "bloom" on the shell which helps seal the pores and protects the delicate meat of the egg from air and odors. So if eggs are soiled, don't wash them--just wipe with a rough dry cloth. And keep in mind the best way to store eggs--cool, fairly moist, and away from odors and drying motion of the air.

Now, let's go on to our next mailbag letter: "I feel as though some good use might be made of our Christmas tree when we take it down. Can you suggest any way

it might be used?"

According to ancient superstition, it was bad luck to throw away Christmas greens, so people usually burned them or fed them to the cattle. Nowadays we don't believe in this superstition, but we're practical about getting the most use out of everything, and the Christmas tree is no exception. The Forest Service suggests that with the fuel situation as it is this year, your tree can help keep you warm after it's served as a holiday decoration. Cut the tree into lengths for your fireplace or stove, and tie the sticks in a bundle to dry. They'll make a cheerful hot blaze when you burn them. The branches of your tree might come in handy for protecting some of the flower beds in your garden during the winter. Even the dry needles that fall on the floor are useful: sweep them up and scatter them on icy walks and steps to help prevent falls.

And now for the last letter in today's mailbag. This homemaker writes, "We don't heat the bedrooms of our house, so the clothes closets are quite cold. A friend has told me that I can store my summer woolens in these closets without any extra precautions, because the moths die in cold temperatures. Is this true?"

The entomologists of the Department of Agriculture say that moth larvae-- the moth worms that eat your clothes--become dormant when the temperature gets below fifty degrees Fahrenheit. But they don't die, and as soon as the temperature warms up, they'll resume their normal destructive activities. It takes zero temperature actually to kill moth larvae. Low temperatures may keep moth eggs from hatching, and if they don't hatch within a month of the time they're laid, the eggs usually die. But any larvae that are already hatched will simply remain dormant, waiting for warmer weather to go ahead with their meals of woolen and fur fibres.

So even though your clothes closets may possibly be cold enough to halt moth damage during coldest weather, you can't depend on this kind of protection. To be on the safe side, give your summer woolens careful storage. Make sure they're absolutely clean, and then store them with flake naphthalene in sealed bags or boxes. Or, if you don't want to pack them away, take them out of the closet frequently for a thorough sunning and brushing.

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